WATER QUALITY TEAM MEETING NOTES

August 8, 2000
National Marine Fisheries Service Offices
Portland, Oregon

I. Introductions and Review of the Agenda.

Mark Schneider of NMFS, WQT co-chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting, held August 8 at the National Marine Fisheries Service offices in Portland, Oregon. The meeting was facilitated by Jacqueline Abel, who led a round of introductions and a review of the agenda. The group spent a few minutes reviewing the minutes from the last WQT meeting, making a few minor revisions.

II. IT Assignment to WQT Regarding Mike Schneider's Basinwide Dissolved Gas Model.

Schneider reminded the group that, last month, the IT gave the WQT the following assignment with respect to Mike Schneider's basinwide dissolved gas model:

- Develop an understanding of the SYSTDG model, its characteristics, capabilities, strengths, weaknesses and applications
- Develop a timetable to complete the above as well as a timetable for the application of the model to regional dissolved gas issues.

Schneider went briefly through some of the interests expressed by the WQT in the SYSTDG model at last month's meeting:

- Peer review of SYSTDG model
- Model applications to TMDL development
- Application of SYSTDG model to in-season management and TMT decision-making
- Bench testing of SYSTDG model
- Develop WQT recommendation to IT that the SYSTDG model undergo a full formal peer review
- Respond to the IT assignment

- Develop a "road map" and timetable to bring the model to useful application in the region.

At the conclusion of last month's meeting, Schneider and Cathy Tortorici were tasked to draft a letter capturing the results of the WQT's initial assessment of the IT assignment. Schneider said he had discussed this letter with Mike Schneider over the telephone, and that Mike Schneider had requested that the letter not be sent. The reason is that his relationship with BPA is that of a contractor; BPA is the funding agency for the SYSTDG model development, and Mike's feeling was that it would better for him to discuss these issues with BPA, at least initially, Schneider explained.

The conversation with Mike Schneider yielded a number of future actions and needs with respect to the SYSTDG model, Schneider said:

- Documentation of reference work
- Build in web queries to provide model updates to users
- Consideration of liabilities where data for a given site are incomplete
- Fine-tuning of the optimization routine
- Modifications required to allow incorporation of power needs inputs

Russell Harding reiterated his interest in getting his hands on the SYSTDG model, so that the WQT's analysis of the SYSTDG model can get underway as soon as possible; it was agreed that Mark Schneider will contact Mike Schneider soon to follow up on their recent conversation, and will send out a memo to the other WQT participants as soon as he has something to report. I will talk to Mike by early next week at the latest, Schneider said.

III. Discussion of Draft 2000 FCRPS Biological Opinion.

Jim Ruff distributed Enclosure C, the water quality section of the draft Biological Opinion. He and Cathy Tortorici spent a few minutes going through this information, touching on the BiOp's overall water quality strategy, specific project operations, water quality plan implementation and the Water Quality Improvement Team, and current and near-term water quality-related actions and studies. Please refer to Enclosure C for details of their presentation. Among the highlights:

- The long-term (10-year) goal is to work to make progress toward achieving compliance with the 110% TDG standard. This goal is intended to guide operating and capital improvement decisions relating to total dissolved gas created during periods of spill.
- In the future, it will be the responsibility of the Corps, rather than NMFS, to seek TDG waivers for the annual spill program. Ruff noted that the Corps doesn't necessarily agree with this assessment; he specifically asked the state water quality agencies for comments on this

provision. Dick Cassidy said this change would require a change in Corps policy; at the present time, he said he sees no movement on the part of the Corps to make that change, although it is being discussed internally.

- The long-term water temperature goal is standard attainment in all critical habitat in the Columbia and Snake River basins.
- The Water Quality Improvement Team is envisioned as a mechanism to coordinate on issues regarding how to meet water quality goals in the mainstem, and to more fully develop and implement the BiOp's water quality plan; it would include both technical and policy-level participants. It is possible that the WQT could be reconfigured to become the Water Quality Improvement Team, if the region feels that would be appropriate.
- The BiOp's water quality plan is ultimately intended to provide a framework for the coordination of ESA and CWA issues in the mainstem.
- Tortorici distributed Enclosure D, the July 31 letter from Charles Findley of EPA to General Strock of the Corps, expressing EPA's concerns about the current path the Corps is taking to address water quality issues in the mainstem. The letter proposes a process through which EPA, the Corps and other action agencies can work together to resolve the many difficult water quality issues facing the region (please refer to Enclosure D for details).
- The specific dissolved gas abatement actions identified in the BiOp's reasonable and prudent alternative include the following: monitoring the physical and biological effects of total dissolved gas, developing a systemwide dissolved gas model, continued implementation of the Corps' spillway deflector optimization program, evaluating the idea of a divider wall, development and construction of spillway deflectors at Chief Joseph Dam, investigation of gas abatement options at Libby Dam (either spillway deflectors or additional turbine units), continued investigation of removable spillway weirs at various projects in the system, investigation of gas abatement options at Dworshak Dam, design and construction of an end-bay deflector at John Day Dam.
- The water temperature-related actions identified in the 2000 BiOp include: new summer operations at Dworshak Dam, modification of the Dworshak National Fish Hatchery water supply, investigation of the effects of fish ladder water temperature on adult passage, identification and implementation of measures to address juvenile fish mortality associated with high temperatures at McNary Dam, the development of a plan to model water temperature effects related to Snake River operations, and the development of a temperature data collection program in the Snake River.

In response to a question from Margaret Filardo, Ruff said "current and near-term," for the purposes of the actions identified in this BiOp, is defined as within the next five years. Ruff added that, at a special August 16 IT meeting, regional stakeholders will have an opportunity to ask questions about the draft BiOp of the NMFS staff members who developed it; any interested WQT participants are invited to attend this meeting.

In response to a question, Harding said the TMDL reports on the Lower Columbia and Lower Snake rivers are due to be completed in 2001. Ruff added that close of comment on the 2000 FCRPS BiOp is September 29. In response to a question from Harding, Ruff said NMFS currently has no plans to extend the comment period.

IV. Updates.

A. Regional Water Quality Plan. This topic was addressed during the previous agenda item.

V. Next WQT Meeting Date.

The next meeting of the Water Quality Team was set for Tuesday, September 12, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at NMFS' Portland offices. Meeting notes prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.